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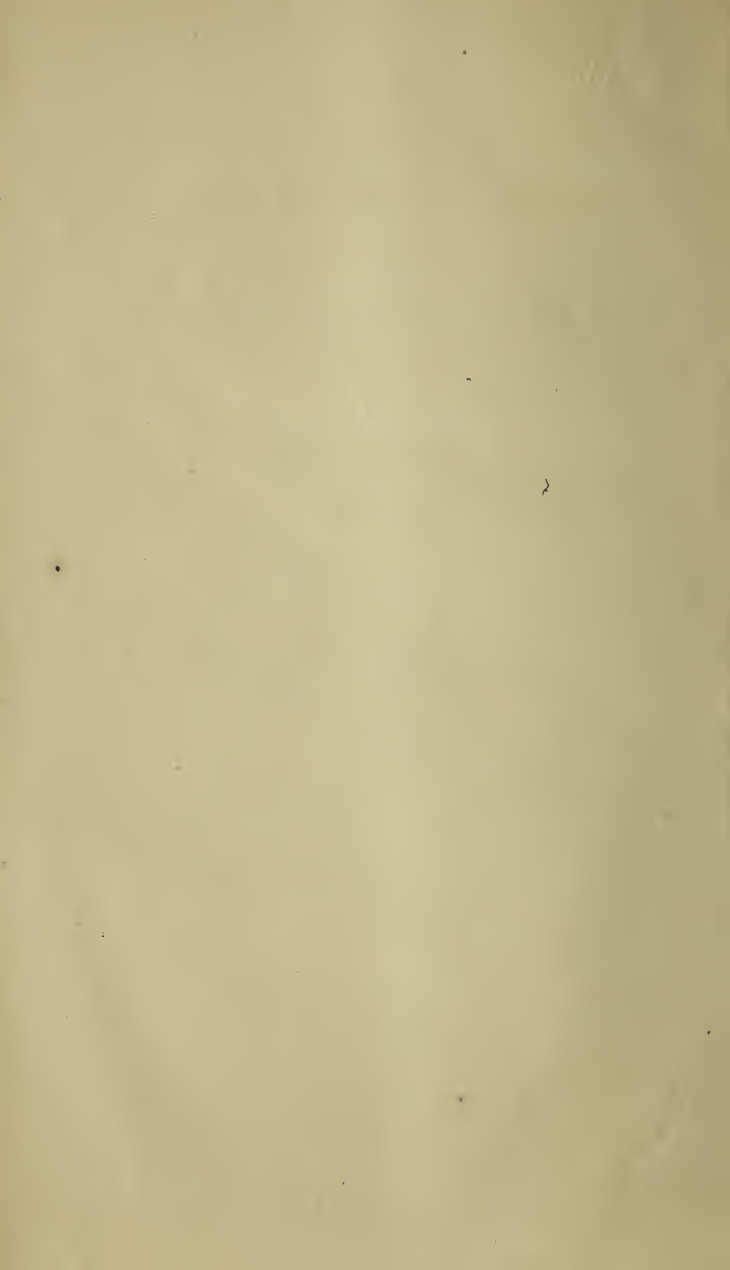
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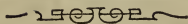
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# HOTEL FLIRTATIONS.



## ACT I.

SCENE I. *A room in Bibbersvale House.*—MR. BIBB discovered seated by a table R., holding a crape band in his left hand, a pair of scissors in his right. White hat lying on the table. Door C. Chairs, sofa, pictures, &c. &c.

BIBB. Seven years have flown on the wings of time since I lost my own dear, dear, Angelina, who, I hope, is an angel in Heaven. It was a sad day when she bade me farewell, leaving me a solitary widower in the wide wide world, without a soul, save my niece Georgiana, to console or comfort me. Alas! nieces, however good they may be, are not to be compared to wives. Like a rash man as I was (we are all rash at times), I made a vow, which I fear I must break ere long. Yes.—Vows are like pie-crusts, made to be broken. I swore I would never marry again. Even if I had not made that vow, it requires a vast deal of courage to submit to the holy bonds of matrimony, when Death, the grim jailor, has struck off the fetters of Hymen, for fetters they be, even with the best of wives. And Angelina was such an angel. She must have been angelical when an infant, to have induced her parents to bestow such a heavenly name upon her. She was so good, so fair, so elegant, so amiable, so graceful! Where shall I find her equal? (*looks at band, then at the scissors*). Ah! this is the instrument used by Atropos to cut the thread of life, spun by Clotho, drawn by Lachesis. Cruel Atropos, why didn't thou cut the thread of my dear Angelina's life? If she heard me she would say, "Silence, thou fool, tempt not the gods! All happens for the best!" I suppose it does. I have been in mourning for the last seven years; yet, and I am almost ashamed to own it, I have been gradually creeping out of it. This band has dwindled by degrees from seven inches down to one. Each year, on the anniversary of her death, Michaelmas day, I cut off an inch, in the fond hope that by the time I came to the last one I should be within an inch of my life. No, here I am, a strong hale man, only forty years of age, having no symptoms whatever of consumption, dyspepsia, lumbago, gout, asthma, or any of the ills that flesh is heir to. Never say die! I shall now proceed to reduce this hat-band from one inch to the diameter of a common ribbon, so that all women may know or learn, that Archer Bibb is once more in the market. (*cuts band—pauses*) I do believe I must look out for a wife; Georgy requires the watchful eye of a mother, even if that mother be only a step one. She is so wild, self-willed, flighty, and ungovernable; it is high time to curb these failings. None but a husband or a mother can curb them. Talking of mothers, whom more fit than the charming widow Beers. I have heard so much about this interest-

ing widow, that I am dying to be introduced to her. I am continually asked "Bibb, have you seen the widow Beers?" "Bibb, why don't you get introduced to the smart Mrs. Beers?" I hear nothing else, but the praises of this widow. In fact, I dream of her by day, and at night her image haunts me. They say she has no end of admirers, whom she manages to keep at arms' length. Though besieged by a legion of lovers, not one can say a word against her. Like Cæsar's wife, she is above suspicion. Just the woman for me. They say she wears one of those unmistakeable advertising sheets on her head, which metaphorically speaking, means—"Wanted a husband!" I must seek this lone, lovely widow—get introduced to her, and, if Mrs. Beers be what the world says, my name is not Bibb if she don't become a Bibb too. (*goes on cutting the band*)

*Enter GEORGY from c.*

GEO. Good morning, uncle.

BIBB. (*without looking up*) Same to you, my dear.

GEO. What on earth are you about, uncle? (*seats herself at table, L*)

BIBB. (*cutting away*) Only reducing the diameter of my hat band.

GEO. Do you mean to say you are going out of mourning?

BIBB. (*looking up*) Mourning, my dear, is going out of me. Don't you think I have mourned quite long enough?

GEO. I have often thought so—wondering why you persevered in wearing it.

BIBB. Ha! There are the seven ages of man. (*puts the band on his hat*) There were the seven ages of mourning of Bibb, O!

GEO. I thought uncle you had made a vow.

BIBB. I have made lots of vows. You will make vows, and like me you will break them. (*puts hat on his head*) There now, how do I look?

GEO. You look well in anything. Tell me uncle, are you serious?

BIBB. Serious about what?

GEO. Why, about going out of mourning.

BIBB. Going my child! I'm gone! and ere many hours elapse we shall go too.

GEO. Go where, uncle?

BIBB. Where Hymen awaits us.

GEO. And where is that?

BIBB. To Brighton, my dear; so make haste, pack up all your finery. Look sharp! Be ready by two, unless you prefer to remain here.

GEO. O! I'm so glad, (*aside*) I shall meet Horatio Churchill there.

BIBB. So am I! Anything for a change. The sea air, the baths, the sands, the pebbles, the cliffs, the downs, the fishing boats, the shrimp women, the devil's dyke, and exercise will do wonders—(*aside*) and so will the widow.

GEO. I shall be ready for the two o'clock train. Can I do anything for you, uncle.

BIBB. No.—Yes, you may devote that remnant of mourning to the flames. Henceforward, Bibb is in the market.

GEO. Did you say market?

BIBB. Ah! I said market, did I?

GEO. Yes, uncle.

BIBB. Ha! Well, never mind—burn that crape, and be ready.

GEO. (*taking crape*) I shall not keep you waiting. *Exit c.*

BIBB. That girl is as sharp as a needle. I have got into a very bad habit, that of talking aloud to myself, and speaking when I am asleep. I know I do, for I hear myself talking when in a doze. I dare say the widow will cure me of that defect, if, when I return to this peaceable abode, she accompanies me as Mrs. Bibb. Oh! Mrs. Beers, if you be single now, I hope ere long you will become double X. *Exit c.*

SCENE II.—*A sitting room at the Royal Hotel, Brighton, handsomely furnished, with table, c. Sofa, chairs, looking glasses, &c. Doors c., R., and L. Windows and curtains R. and L.*

*Enter MARY from c., with a tray, and half a dozen letters.*

MARY. Well I never! Billy duxes keep a pouring in like hail. This makes the third batch I have brought in here this morning. I wonder who they be from. (*takes up one and peeps through it*) From old Timothy Wheatsheaf, the quaker corn factor. These quakers be always dealing in corn and chaff. They likes dear bread, they do, although they always pray for rain and a plentiful harvest. What does he say—(*reads*) “Esteemed friend.—I send thee by rail a hamper containing game. I trust thee will find them like myself—” I can’t read any more. I suppose he means fresh or palatable. The old humbug. (*throws letter down and takes up another*). From Captain Stormthem, of the Rifles. “My dear madam.—I have applied for leave of absence from my Colonel, to enable me to run down to Brighton, when I trust you will lend—” Plague on it, I can see no more. What can he want to borrow? From the Rev. Mr. Lawn. “Dear Mrs. Beers.—Since I left Brighton I have been unable to eat, drink, or sleep, or attend to my flock.” What a fib! “I cannot obliterate the remembrance of the happy hours I spent in your society. I wonder what “the wild waves are saying,” now that I have left their hospitable shore. I have sent you—” (*throwing down letter*) Provoking! Just as I came to an interesting part. Goodness gracious, I never seed a lady with so many followers as Mrs. Beers, the men all want to keep company with her. If she was a housemaid she would soon get notice to leave from her missus. Oh! here she comes.

*Exit MARY L.*

*Enter MRS. BEERS, from C. She wears a widow's cap, and half mourning. Takes off shawl and Bonnet.*

MRS. B. Letters again! and what a number! Plague on the men, they must take me to be Cupid’s amanuensis, or the special correspondent of the *Times*, or the *Ladies’ Magazine*. If I were a Miss Radcliffe, a Mrs. Gore, a Mrs. S. C. Hall, or a Lady Blessington, I should say they persecuted me for the sake of my autograph. Alas! I am neither the one nor the other; nought save a poor lone widow the men will not leave alone. (*sits herself*) Is it my fortune or my face that attracts? Perhaps both. Poor Beers, you little dreamed, in your philosophy, what a magnet you left behind you! (*takes up a letter—reads*) From that hypocritical old quaker, who is for ever talking of the corn laws and the sliding scale. When the market is up, down he rushes to Brighton; when it is down he writes me doleful letters and

sends me game. Who is this from? the Rev. Mr. Lawn. He sends me a book printed during the time of the Commonwealth—there it is. (*tears off the cover*) What is this? (*reads*) “Eggs of Charity laid by the Fowls of the Covenant, boiled in the Water of Divine Love—take Thou and Eat.” What a title! Does he mean that I am to eat the eggs or the book? Mr. Ben-jam-in Lawn you are not jam for me! (*opens the other letters hastily*) Captain Stormthem, you are a bore and a puppy; remain in London and attend to your drill. Mr. Justis Justus, you won’t suit me; mind your briefs and leave widows alone. No, no, when Rosa Beers changes her name, it shall be for one who will appreciate her. Until I meet with that man, Beers will continue to wear her weeds, in spite of all *Punch* says about their being a notice “To parties about to marry.”

*Enter MARY from c., with a bouquet.*

MARY. If you please, ma’am, Mr. Malt, the brewer, has sent this with his respectful respects. He hopes you are well.

MRS. B. (*not noticing*) What is that?

MARY. A bucket, ma’am.

MRS. B. Lay it upon the table.

MARY. It smells so nice, and Mr. Malt told me—

MRS. B. Never mind what Mr. Malt said. I shan’t change Beers for Malt, anyhow. Any fresh arrivals to-day?

MARY. Yes, ma’am. A Mr. and a Miss Bibb! (*aside*) What names for grown-up infants!

MRS. B. Bibb, did you say?

MARY. That is the name.

MRS. B. Of Bibbersvale?

MARY. I don’t know, ma’am, anything about the whale.

MRS. B. Vale, you stupid. Does he come from Bibbersvale?

MARY. I will go and ask Bob.

MRS. B. And who is Bob?

MARY. Mr. Bibbs’ valet.

MRS. B. Do speak properly, Mary; it is valet.

MARY. Well, valet; I said valet.

MRS. B. I know you did. What do you know about the Bibbs’?

MARY. A good deal. I know why he comes here.

MRS. B. If he keeps a valet he must be well to do. It must be the same person.

MARY. I dare say it is. Bob says he is very comfortable.

MRS. B. Do you mean Mr. Bibb or Bob?

MARY. I mean Mr. Bibb; and Miss Bibb, his niece, is such a nice young lady.

MRS. B. Did Bob tell you what brought them to Brighton.

MARY. He did; but it’s a secret.

MRS. B. (*aside*) I’ll worm it out of her. (*loud*) A secret?

MARY. Bob told me all about it. I promised not to tell.

MRS. B. That is right, Mary, don’t tell. But if Bob told you, it cannot be such a wonderful secret. I suppose he comes for sea-bathing?

MARY. Nothing of the kind; water don’t agree with him.

MRS. B. I suppose his niece is in bad health.



MARY. Lor, Ma'am, she is as strong as a lion. I should so like to tell you, but I promised Bob.

MRS. B. Never mind Bob. Have you seen Mr. Bibb? How old is he? Good-looking or ugly?

MARY. Oh yes, I have seen him. Such a nice gentleman—I should say about thirty-seven—not at all bad-looking.

MRS. B. Married or single?

MARY. He be a widower, sure.

MRS. B. Are you quite sure of that.

MARY. He lost his wife seven years ago, and Bob says as how he has been in mourning ever since. He cuts an inch off the hat-band every year on Michaelmas day, and, strange to say, he performed that last operation this morning, so Mr. Bibb has gone out of mourning in right earnest.

MRS. B. What a strange idea.

MARY. And what do you think, ma'am, brings him here?

MRS. B. How can I tell?

MARY. He has come to Brighton in chase of a wife.

MRS. B. Nonsense.

MARY. It is quite true. Ah! and Bob told me something more!

MRS. B. Bob seems a useful person to know.

MARY. Indeed he is. He has come after a widow.

MRS. B. Who—Mr. Bob or Mr. Bibb?

MARY. Bless your heart, why Mr. Bibb! And I know the lady.

MRS. B. Indeed!

MARY. Yes, he heard as how this widow was a-turning all the men's heads at Brighton, so he has come to have his'n turned too.

MRS. B. How extraordinary. Who is this widow?

MARY. Her name begins with a B.

MRS. B. Staying at—?

MARY. This very hotel.

MRS. B. (*aside*) That's me. (*to Mary*) I wish you would ask Bob as to the respectability of this Mr. Bibb. I fancy I know all about him. When Bob has told you we can compare notes.

MARY. (*aside*) I thought she had had notes enough to-day. (*loud*) Shall I fetch Bob, ma'am?

MRS. B. You may—first take this into my bed-room. (*takes off her weeds*).

MARY. (*aside*) Well, I never! (*takes cap*) Yes, ma'am. *Exit C.*

MRS. B. This, then, is Bob's secret. It is self evident that the widower Bibb has come to court the widow Beers, who, forsooth, has no doubt heard that she possesses broad acres, cattle, sheep, and home-steads without number. We must have some fun with this Mr. Bibb. I will send for the Churchills in order to carry out my scheme. (*thinks*) Yes, Mrs. Churchill must act the part of a widow, and Dr. C. the part of brother to his own wife. What fun we will have. Two widows for one widower. What a game!

*Enter MARY followed by BOB from C., they place themselves R.*

MARY. Please ma'am, this is the young man, Robert Grooms.

MRS. B. Mary tells me you belong to Mr. Bibb's establishment?

BOB. 'Ees, ma'am. (*scrapes and bows*) Servant, ma'am. I hope I sees you well.

MRS. B. Mary tells me you are old acquaintances.

BOB. 'Ees, ma'am. I know'd Mary, and she know'd me, when she was 'ousemaid to Squire Snowden. We was fellow servants there. I left becous a couldn't hagree with master about the taming of horses. I said Mr. Rarey was right, and he said Mr. Rarey was wrong, that's why I left him. I then hadvertised, and as luck would ave it, enlisted in Mr. Bibb's 'ousehold. He is a werry respectable gent.

MRS. B. So I hear. A bit of a politician, is he not?

BOB. 'Ees, ma'am, quite so. I knows Polly whom you halludes to.

MRS. B. You don't understand me, Robert. I mean he mixes himself up in local matters, such as taxes.

BOB. Oh, I comprehend now. He's dead against taxes, and his for hever talking about sesinding the duties on paper, and halleviating the tax on tea and sugar. He 'ates the hincome tax awful bad.

MRS. B. Do you know what brings him to Brighton?

BOB. Why, ma'am, that's a secret.

MARY. You may tell my missus; she won't split.

BOB. If that be the case I don't mind telling. He's in the market.

MRS. B. How in the market? What does he mean?

BOB. I don't know desactly, but I fancy he's for sale.

MRS. B. How for sale?

BOB. On the look-out for a wife.

MRS. B. Does Mr. Bibb call that selling himself?

BOB. Not quite. You see my master is werry fond of talking to heself in his sleep; 'pecially of a morning. When I go into his bedroom I often hear him talking of Beer. It was only yesterday I could make out what he meant. He meant you, I'm sure he did, ma'am. So he tells Miss Georgy this morning, quite unexpectedly, to pack up, and here they his.

MRS. B. Now Bob, and you, Mary, listen to me. You are capital people to keep a secret, so I am going to let you into one, and strike a bargain with you both to keep it. So long as you hold your tongues, and do as I bid, you shall each of you receive £2 per day, payable when my game is played out. If you say but one word you will lose the fee. I will let you know my plans presently; meanwhile take this. (*offers a sovereign to BOB*).

BOB. Thank you, ma'am; you may depend upon me. (*puts it in his pocket*).

MARY. And upon me also.

MRS. B. Not one word to Mr. or Miss Bibb.

BOB. Not upon any consideration. I never lets secrets out.

MARY. Nor I.

MRS. B. Of course not; but this time be more particular than ever. Bob, you may retire.

BOB. (*going, but returns*) If you please, ma'am, seeing as Mary and me is old friends, do you object to hour keeping company.

MRS. B. Not in the least, so long as you keep my secret.

BOB. Thank you, ma'am. Your servant, ma'am. (*going to door c*).

MARY. Thank you, ma'am. (*going*).

MRS. B. Mary, I want you. Bob you may go. *Exit BOB, c., bowing.* Ascertain if Dr. and Mrs. Churchill, and Mr. Horatio are within. If so request them to do me the favour to call, or, if more convenient, I will wait upon them. Mind, hold your tongue.

MARY. Never fear. I'm the girl to keep a secret. *Exit c.*

MRS. B. So it seems. How nicely I have extracted this secret from them. I wondered what could have brought Mr. Bibb and his niece to Brighton. Certainly not for a dip in the sea, nor for change of air, for I am told Bibbersvale Hall is a lovely spot, only thirty miles from the coast. The case is clear, Bibb comes to woo Mrs. Beers, who, on her part, has no objection to change her name, popular as it is, from Beers to Bibb. Besides, having the same initials, it will be an enormous saving in the marking of the linen, both of us being B's. I wonder whether it is "to be, or not to be?" I've a mind to say *it shall* be. The difficulty is this; how am I to be made acquainted with Mr. Bibb? When I see the Churchills I will decide upon the course to be adopted. Diplomacy is the order of the day.

*Enter MARY from c.*

MARY. Please, ma'am, Dr., Mrs., and Master Horatio Churchill present their compliments and will be here immediately.

MRS. B. Good, you may go. (*exit MARY, c*) The arrangements are excellent. That is my bedroom, (*points L.*) that is Mrs. Churchill's, (*R.*) They must unlock that door so that I can communicate with them at pleasure and use this as our joint drawing room. Nothing will be easier than to carry on the game without interfering with their domestic comforts. Here they come.

(*Enter DR., MRS., and HORATIO CHURCHILL from c.*)

Delighted to see you. Where have you been?

DR. C. We have been to the Devil's Dyke to see the hounds throw off. Bless me, Mrs. Beers, what have you thrown off? (*pointing to her head*).

MRS. B. I have only pitched my weeds away.

MRS. C. What an improvement!

MRS. B. Do you think so? I thought the cap becoming.

HOR. (*crossing to L.*) What's in the wind?

MRS. B. What sport had you?

HOR. First rate. But what about the widow's cap? that's a puzzler.

MRS. B. Since you had fine sport at the Devil's Dyke, I intend that we shall have some fine sport here. I need your assistance. A Mr. Bibb, a widower, and his niece, have just arrived at this hotel. He is well off, but what do you think brought him here?

DR. C. The old story—salt water and rough towels.

MRS. B. Nothing of the kind.

MRS. C. The air and the Chain Pier.

MRS. B. You are nearer the mark, for the chains he is in search of require *Peers* to support them.

MRS. C. Do you mean matrimony?

MRS. B. Precisely! then I hear his niece, Miss Georgiana Bibb, is pretty.

HOR. (*aside*) By Jove, I know her! It must be her.

DR. C. Horatio, my boy, here is a chance for you.

Mrs. C. What magnet has attracted this widower from his nutshell?

Mrs. B. Promise to keep the secret, and I will divulge all. I am the magnet. He has never seen me, and I do not wish to surrender without a bit of fun, although I have struck my weeds. You, Mrs. Churchill, must pretend to be a widow; as such, your husband, who will personify your brother, will introduce you. I will allow him, in the first instance, to make love to me, but will induce him to turn his thoughts towards you. I will play the prude—object to everything he proposes; in short, be a sort of wet blanket, while you must be docility and amiability itself. We shall have such fun. What say you, doctor?

Dr. C. Provided it don't go too far, I don't mind. What about the servants?

Mrs. B. I have purchased their adhesion.

Dr. C. And the boarders?

Mrs. B. You and Mr. Horatio must arrange that.

Mrs. C. What a game! Am I to put on weeds?

Mrs. B. No. He has been clipping his hat-band, inch by inch; we have doffed ours this very day. Mind! seven years, both of us.

*Enter MARY from c.*

MARY. Please sir, a Mr. Bibb, who has just arrived from the country, has enquired after you. He has a letter of introduction. Can he see you?

Dr. C. By all means, show him in.

HOR. Capital! (*aside*) How shall I manage with Georgiana?

MARY. (*aside*) Now the fun is going to begin. *Exit MARY, c.*

Mrs. B. (*to Mrs. C.*) Mind, you are the widow Churchill.

*Re-enter MARY, showing in MR. BIBB and GEORGY.*

BIBB. (*looking at Dr. C.*) Dr. Churchill, I presume.

Dr. C. My name is Churchill.

BIBB. Permit me to hand you a letter of introduction, which I have had in my possession for upwards of three years. Mr. Dance, who gave it to me, was killed in India. I accidentally heard you were here, and remembering I had the letter in my possession, I thought I could not do better than present it. (*presents letter*)

Dr. C. (*opening it*) Ah, yes! from dear Dance. You remember him, dear sister. My sister, (*to BIBB*) Mrs. Churchill, a widow; she lost her husband in India. My poor brother, her husband, was killed there. Happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Bibb. Your niece, I suppose?

BIBB. Yes, doctor, Miss Georgiana Bibb.

Dr. C. (*bows*) Proud to make your acquaintance, Miss Bibb. My sister, Mrs. Churchill. (*Mrs. C. and GEORGY shake hands*) Mr. Bibb, allow me to present you to Mrs. Beers.

HORATIO recognizes MISS GEORGY, shakes hands, and converses with her, R.C.

BIBB. (*astonished*) Mrs. Beers!

Dr. C. Yes, Mrs. Beers.

BIBB. The widow?

Mrs. B. (*with downcast eyes*) Alas, sir, I am a widow.



BIBB. Then you must be the lady I have heard so much about. (*they converse together*)

DR. C. Horatio, where are you? Well, if he isn't whispering to Miss Bibb!

HOR. Yes, uncle, I'm coming.

DR. C. Don't monopolize Miss Bibb. Miss Bibb, allow me to present you to Mrs. Beers. (*to Mrs. B.*) Miss Bibb.

GEO. (*surprised*) Mrs. Beers! La! How funny!

MRS. B. (*advancing*) Why is it funny, Miss Bibb? Widows are generally the reverse of funny. It is to them you young ladies should sing, "Away with melancholy!"

GEO. Pardon me, I should have said, how extraordinary.

MRS. B. Pray explain.

GEO. To think of our meeting you the very day we arrive at Brighton, when uncle was talking—rather wondering how he could make your acquaintance.

MRS. B. Indeed!

GEO. Pray do not tell him I said so.

MRS. B. By no means. (*aside*) The case is clear, it is evident he comes for me.

MRS. C. (*crossing to Mrs. B.*) What think you of Mr. Bibb?

MRS. B. I can hardly tell. Play your cards as I direct you, and mind you notice him. Try and catch his eye, and when you have done so, withdraw your gaze and examine the pattern of the carpet. Repeat that several times, and you will succeed in attracting his attention and monopolise him. Try to blush, if you can; at our age—(*whispers, they laugh*)

BIBB. (*examining the two*), (*aside*) Two buxom widows. Splendid creatures! Bibb thou art in luck. I came for one; egad, I pitch upon duplicates. I shall play with my person, and—and—take my choice.

HORATIO and GEORGIANA walk to and fro, c. MRS. C. crosses to R. to converse with DR. C. MRS. BEERS, as if by accident, finds herself, F.C., beside BIBB.

MRS. B. You were saying, Mr. Bibb, that you had heard of me. I suppose you allude to the irreparable loss I sustained, some seven years ago.

BIBB. I had heard of that, as a matter of course; but I also heard that you were the admiration of Brighton. Were I to tell you all I heard—

MRS. B. You would make me as vain as a peacock.

BIBB. Never, madam; you have too much good sense to be guilty of such folly.

MRS. B. How know you that?

BIBB. Know! I have heard so much about you these last four years from my friends, that I know you are far too sensible to become vain. Oh, how I have longed to see you! But for my fatal vow, I should ere this have cast aside my mourning, and sought the charming widow Beers. I had positively sworn to wait seven years in order to try and live in single blessedness. This cycle expired this very day, and, whom should I behold, when I least expected it, but the enchanting Mrs. Beers.

MRS. B. Rumour, as well as your friends, have been very kind ; I hope she will not disappoint your expectations.

BIBB. If I may judge from appearances, Rumour is no liar.

MRS. B. What do you think of Mrs. Churchill? She, like us both, has also been seven years a widow. She is rich ; owns some splendid estates in Yorkshire, is of an even temper, quite the reverse of mine. I should advise you strongly to cultivate her acquaintance. She is so gentle, that to use an expression in vogue upon the turf, you might lead her with a packthread. She wants no taming, no drilling, her first husband did that, which will save you or her future husband a vast deal of trouble. As for me, I'm a regular shrew ; violent and awfully jealous. In short, wretchedly so.

BIBB. You don't say so.

MRS. B. He who catches me, catches a tartar !

BIBB. I should have thought you were the cream of tartar. The fact is, you want to divert my thoughts from yourself to Mrs. Churchill. I declare, most solemnly, I shall do nothing of the kind. I hope you do not intend, having just arrived at Brighton, to send me to Coventry.

MRS. B. Oh ! by no means. I merely wished to give you some friendly advice.

BIBB. For which I am obliged. (*they exchange a few words—by-play*)

DR. C. (*to HORATIO*) Horatio ! one word ! (*he leaves GEORGIANA who joins MRS. C.*)

HORATIO. Yes, uncle.

DR. C. Have you let Miss Bibb into the secret ?

HORATIO. I have. You may trust her.

DR. C. Then leave me. Try to bring Mrs. Beers and Miss Bibb together, while I talk to Bibb : your aunt will join you. (*HORATIO makes a sign to MRS. BEERS, and leads her to c., where MRS. C. joins them*)  
Mr. Bibb—one word, if you please.

BIBB. At your service, sir.

DR. C. How long do you contemplate remaining at Brighton ?

BIBB. That depends upon circumstances. A week, a fortnight, a month—perhaps, two. All depends upon circumstances. (*looks at the ladies pointedly*)

DR. C. I understand. If you have nothing better to do, what say you to a walk on the Chain Pier ?

BIBB. With all my heart, (*turns to the ladies*) provided the ladies are agreeable.

MRS. C. By all means, Mr. Bibb, I shall be so happy.

MRS. B. And I !

GEO. And I !

DR. C. Then make us all happy by putting on your bonnets and shawls. (*to BIBB*) I am delighted to think you have come, for to tell you the truth, I have had my hands full with these two widows. They expect so much of me, and my duties have been rather onerous. Besides, I hate walking with a lady on each arm. It makes a man look so ridiculous.

BIBB. I should say so. You never know what you are about.

DR. C. Precisely ; especially if they both talk together, and it is impossible, being in the middle, to face right and face left at the same time. I abominate the system, and now that you have arrived so opportunely

we shall be able to relieve guard. Besides, my sister-in-law will be happier with a stranger than with a relative, for relatives are bores, and I commend her to your especial care. She has many good qualities, which you will discover by degrees, when you become better acquainted with her. Moreover, she is rich.

BIBB. So Mrs. Beers tells me.

DR. C. It is'nt I that ought to say it; but, between ourselves, she is a treasure.

BIBB. And what is Mrs. Beers?

DR. C. She is another. However, you will soon be able to judge for yourself which is the greater treasure of the two.

BIBB. And I suppose I must consider myself a most fortunate man to have stumbled on two such treasures. (*aside*) Two deuced fine women, anyhow.

DR. C. You must not take any heed of my sister's bashfulness; the fact is Cornelia has led a most secluded life these last seven years.

BIBB. Cornelia! What a pretty name.

DR. C. Classical. Your late wife's name was—?

BIBB. Angelina. Dear Angelina! (*points upwards*)

DR. C. Angelical! Well, the classical and the angelical usually go hand in hand, like the arts and sciences. Ah! the ladies are ready.

MRS. B. When you have concluded your conference, we shall be happy of your company, gentlemen.

BIBB. Madam, I am quite at your service.

DR. C. (*aside to BIBB*) Offer your arm to Mrs. Churchill.

BIBB (*aside to DR. C.*)

Kind thanks. The widow Beers I'll try to-day,  
That I may judge of what stuff she is made;  
To-morrow, if the day is fine, I may  
With widow Churchill saunter in the shade.  
I long to see, what you've seen by the sea;  
Alternately each widow I will try—  
No longer *Relicts* shall *Derelicts* be,  
If they entrance the soul and please the eye.  
As *alter ego*, therefore you agree,  
(That ere I lead a widow to the altar)  
Which of the twain, the widow B. or C.,  
Is doomed to place around my neck—a halter.

BIBB offers his arm to MRS. B.; DR. C., his to his wife; HORATIO leads off GEORGIANA.

END OF ACT I

## ACT II.

SCENE FIRST.—*Same apartment.**Enter ROBERT, from c.*

BOB. Well! I never see such goings on in all my born days. I begin to think master has taken leave of his senses. We have been three weeks here, and he is getting deeper and deeper in love with that sham widder. As for being in love, it seems Mr. Horatio is bad enough, considering; and I, pretty bad, not considering—but master is the worserer. That Mrs. Churchill is an artful dodger, and yet I thinks the real widow is the artfullest, for she pulls the strings. Master, at first, was uncommon sweet on widow Beers, but howsomever he has backed out a bit. What will he do when he finds out it's all a sham. I'll get the sack, that's certain.

*Enter MARY from l.*

MARY. You here, Robert.

BOB. 'Ees. I come to look arter you, Mary. Our folks being out, I thought you and I might have a bit of chat in the drawing room.

MARY. Thank you, Robert. What do you say about your master?

BOB. I think he's on the road to Bedlam.

MARY. You don't say so.

BOB. Ah! but I does. The real and the sham widders are making a fool on him.

MARY. Which of the two think you he likes the best?

BOB. That's a poser. At first your missus carried the day, but she slackened her speed into a canter, and Mrs. Churchill has shot a-head. She will win by a good many necks, unless she or master breaks hers. I wonder what the real widder is arter.

MARY. I know.

BOB. It's well to be you. How long is this game to be carried on?

MARY. So long as Dr. Churchill don't go frantic with jealousy. He is all on the boil just now.

BOB. I hope he won't bust.

MARY. I trust not; but I dont think this game can last much longer. He don't half like calling his wife, sister, and allowing her to keep company with Mr. Bibb.

BOB. Well, it can't be very pleasant to his feelings to see my master with his wife all day; calling her his dear Cornelia; taking her out in flys, all by herself; riding out on horseback, with no one but me. Then they go to the Pawillion, and to all sorts of places. Such wooing and cooing can only end in a grand *few de joy*.

MARY. What's that?

BOB. That's what Master Horatio calls it. It means flare up in English—some French saying of his.

MARY. I sees.

BOB. That's more than I does. I know I dreads the consequences.

MARY. Not I! it will all end well. My missus is too clever.

BOB. And master is not to be trifled with. It ar'n't because he has shut hisself up for years, studying Milton and Paradise Lost, Addison and the Pope's works.

MARY. La! Bob! is he Roman?

BOB. Roman? No. He's a Briton to the back-bone; so was the Pope he is continually reading, till I have got a lot of it by heart. Then he is for ever studying a play called Kato. I often catch him answering me. When I said, "Master, I must order more woats." "Well," says he, "it must be so; Pato, thou reasonest well."

MARY. Who, on earth, is Pato?

BOB. Some horse doctor, I suppose, or a woman-tamer.

MARY. The idea of a woman-tamer. Well I never!

BOB. He studied the art afore coming to Brighton to pick up a wife. Now he's a hadept. So is master Horatio, he be taming Miss Georgiana.

MARY. And pray what is Master Robert Grooms doing?

BOB. As for Robert Grooms, he is being tamed by a charming ladies' maid, called Mary Stubbs. (*knocking heard*)

MARY. Here are our folks come home. Make haste—open the door.

BOB *exits* C., MARY L.

*Enter* DR. CHURCHILL *and* BIBB, *from* C.

DR. C. I am delighted to hear you have such a good opinion of my sister. I knew she would improve on acquaintance.

BIBB. My dear doctor, Cornelia is a charming creature.

DR. C. You were, at first, rather smitten with Mrs. Beers. (MRS. BEERS *opens her bedroom door and listens*.)

BIBB. I do not deny it. Indeed, I still admire her very much. She is a very fine woman, very. Between ourselves, I fancy she is rather prudish. She is not half as amiable as she was the first two or three days after my introduction to her. When I asked her to go out with me, she invariably replied, "What! alone?" as if there was any harm in it. And then I got so sick of hearing her stereotyped answer and question, "O, Mr. Bibb! What will the world say?" Hang the world, doctor, what cares the world for me. When I lost my darling Angelina, did the world mourn her loss? Did it go into mourning as *I* did? I mourned for seven long years. Did the world sympathise or say, "Mr. Bibb, why do you lead the life of a hermit?" Not one man or woman was there to say,

"Turn gentle hermit of the dale,  
I'll guide *thy* lonely way,  
To where a *widow* cheers the vale—"  
Come forth! list to her lay.

No, doctor, the world left me to clip my hat band; to study Pope, Byron, Addison, Moore, and Milton; to dig and delve; plant cabbages, potatoes, and parsnips, and to eat them in solitude. Hang the world!

DR. C. You are a philosopher.



BIBB. Perhaps I am. Cincinnatus was a philosopher—Garibaldi is a philosopher—Why should Archer Bibb not be a philosopher?

DR. C. Why should you not?

BIBB. Ah! Why should I not! What was I saying, doctor?

DR. C. You were hanging the world.

BIBB. Just so. Let it hang. But, as regards your sister, I do like her disposition, marvellously. She does love a walk by moonlight. It's so sentimental. You can say things by moonlight you cannot say in broad daylight, with the sun glaring in your eyes. Besides, you can do things by moonlight which would be positively ridiculous in daylight.

DR. C. Ha! "Meet me by moonlight alone."

BIBB. Just so! "And then I will tell you a tale." Bye the bye, your sister has a charming voice.

DR. C. Did she sing for you?

BIBB. She did. "Something to love me, something to pet." It was delicious! And then she has such nice soft hands.

DR. C. Really! It never struck me.

BIBB. Why should it; brothers never notice these things. I do love to kiss them.

DR. C. What! have you come to that already?

BIBB. Already, do you say? I should think I had. Ah, doctor, you do not know Archer Bibb. He never does things by halves.

DR. C. The devil he don't!

BIBB. When I make up my mind to carry the day, I carry it. Have you ever had a kiss in the dark?

DR. C. You don't mean to say you have kissed my sister?

BIBB. I don't mean to tell you, my dear brother—for brothers we soon shall be—what I have done. Cornelia might not like it.

DR. C. (*aside*) This will never do. (*loud*) Has my sister permitted you to kiss her?

BIBB. Have *you* ever taken a kiss in the dark? Answer me, brother.

DR. C. Doctors are privileged persons.

BIBB. So are lovers. Besides, I am engaged.

DR. C. Engaged!

BIBB. Of course. Why not? Look at this. (*takes a small box out of his pocket and opens it*) How do you like this ring?

DR. C. Charming! Elegant! Tasteful!—very.

BIBB. It is a present for your sister. As she wears a wedding ring, the same ring will serve for her second wedding. I intend this as the keeper.

DR. C. Then you positively intend to marry my sister.

BIBB. Decidedly. See this (*points to inside of ring*); A. B., that's me, to C. C., that's your sister—do you see?

DR. C. Yes, I see. (*aside*) By jingo, he is going ahead with a vengeance.

BIBB. I hope you don't object?

DR. C. Oh! no—not in the least. (*aside*) What the devil am I to do?

BIBB. I proposed this morning.

DR. C. What!

BIBB. Proposed!

DR. C. And what said my—Cornelia—my sister?

BIBB. Oh! I am to have a definitive reply this afternoon. I think it

is all right, and that ere long, you and I will be brothers in earnest. I shall be so kind to Cornelia. She shall have all she wants. Now, doctor, if you would pop the question to the widow Beers.

DR. C. Me!

BIBB. Yes—you! Then we might all be married on the same day. I know Horatio has made it all right with Georgy. Three weddings, and all on the same day! We will spend the honeymoon at Bibbersvale. What fun we shall have.

DR. C. Rare fun, no doubt! (*aside*) What on earth is to be done?

BIBB. I think Mrs. Beers is just the woman to suit you. I know she likes you.

DR. C. Does she? (*aside*) I hope she likes this. A pretty mess she has got us in.

BIBB. She told me so this morning.

DR. C. I am much obliged for the hint. The sooner I see Mrs. Beers the better.

BIBB. I should say so. Strike the iron while it is hot.

DR. C. (*highly excited*) Of course. (*aside*) I'd like to kick Bibb and widow Beers into a cocked hat. I shall go mad if this lasts much longer. I will!

BIBB. (*seeing him gesticulating*) What's the matter?

DR. C. I was turning in my mind what to say. It is a delicate question.

BIBB. Poh! poh! my dear fellow. It's nothing of the kind when you are accustomed to it. Nothing, I assure you. Shall I break the ice?

DR. C. Hang it no! (*aside*) There has been too much ice broken already. (*loud*) Good bye for the present. I will seek the widow Beers. (*MRS. BEERS closes her door*)

BIBB. And I go to seek Cornelia.

*Exit BIBB, C.*

DR. C. A pretty kettle of fish. I'll be hanged if I can stand this nonsense any longer. Kisses in the dark! Squeezing of the hand! What next? I must at once put a stop to this, be the consequences what they may.

*Exit DR. C., R.*

*Enter HORATIO and GEORGIANA from C.*

HOR. The plot thickens. Your uncle has actually popped the question to my uncle's wife.

GEO. It is one of the best jokes I have seen or heard of for a long time.

HOR. So it is; but this game cannot last for ever. How Bob, but more especially that chatterbox of a Mary, to say nothing of the other servants, have kept the secret, puzzles me. Even the boarders, who enjoy the joke amazingly, have kept the cat in the bag. It is perfectly marvellous! I never heard of a secret being so well kept. I laid a wager with my uncle that the secret would be out before the end of the week. I shall lose £10.

GEO. A mere trifle.

HOR. It must be a case of horrible bribery and corruption in some quarter or the other; those servants must be well paid for holding their tongues. I suppose Mrs. Beers foots the bill.

GEO. I dare say she will, or put her foot into it. As for your aunt, Horatio, she is admirable—innimitable! She plays her part to perfection. One would think she was mad in love with my uncle.

HOR. And I begin to think uncle is mad, or on the high road to madness. Only his fancy being concealed behind the curtains, whilst your uncle Bibb was courting my aunt Cornelia. He called her his dear Cornelia.

GEO. What! Your uncle, the doctor, hid himself behind the curtains?

HOR. Pos.—I saw his boots.

GEO. If he had had a sneezing fit?

HOR. But he had not one, fortunately.

GEO. What did my uncle do?

HOR. *Horresco referens*. I saw him on his marrow-bones before his dear Cornelia; with upraised eyes, like ducks in thunder, his lips uttering the most impassioned words lips could give expression to;—words steeped in honey, varnished with molasses.

GEO. La! What next?

HOR. He set to work kissing my aunt's hands most voraciously!

GEO. The cormorant! And next?

HOR. He put his arms round my aunt's waist—

GEO. And then?—

HOR. He kissed her rosy cheek—

GEO. And?—

HOR. The curtains moved.

GEO. I should say they did. But what did your aunt say?

HOR. Nothing. What could she say?

GEO. What did your uncle do?

HOR. He peeped through the curtains.

GEO. How exciting! Pray proceed.

HOR. I thought he was going to spring upon Mr. Bibb, like a tiger from his lair—grasp him by his collar—throttle or strangle him—perhaps be the death of Bibb.

GEO. And—

HOR. He quietly drew back his excited features, and closed the curtains.

GEO. What a position for a husband to find himself in.

HOR. Awkward, very awkward. I felt compassion for my poor uncle, and resolved to put an end to his martyrdom. So I gave a loud cough—bounced into the room, exclaiming, "Oh!" then, pretending to be very sorry for interrupting their *tete a tete*, apologised for the intrusion;—at the same time winking at my uncle, who, at that very moment, peeped through the curtains.

GEO. I suppose my uncle looked very foolish?

HOR. Not he. My aunt screamed and rushed out of the room. Mr. Bibb, who was on his knees, jumped up and rushed after her; and my uncle stalked out of his place of concealment, as white as the ghost in Hamlet—exclaiming, "Oh! nephew!" To which I replied, "O! my prophetic soul, my uncle." Fortunately Mrs. Beers came in, and I made my exit, double-quick march!

GEO. He must be very miserable.



HOR. I expect he wishes Mrs. Beers at the bottom of one of Barclay's vats.

GEO. I dare say all will end well.

HOR. I do not doubt it, if you will do as aunt does.

GEO. In which way !

HOR. By lending a favourable ear to my suit. Do you think, Georgy., I will suit you ?

GEO. Well. Now—

HOR. Don't play the prude. You have seen enough of me, and more especially for the last three weeks to know, whether Horatio Churchill, with £750 per annum, is worth stooping to pick up.

GEO. I might go further and fare worse.

HOR. So you might, my dear Miss B. You know the lines about the little busy bee ?

GEO. Perfectly. That busy bee is no other than Mrs. Beers.

HOR. Nay, not her, though busy she *be*, Heaven knows. I mean a different bee altogether. Listen—

Why doth the pretty Brighton B,  
On cliff, chain pier, or hill,  
Cause palpitations of the heart  
Of Horatio Churchill ?

GEO. That is a question I cannot answer.

HOR. Because that charming Brighton B.,  
Whose praise I ever sing,  
Whilst sucking honey from my heart,  
Left, in that heart,—a sting !

GEO. (*playfully*) Dearest drone, how can I extract it without causing you torture or pain ?

HOR. By a very simple process. By wedding me, we shall, of course, *be* one, and my heart will naturally *be* your heart, so that there will be no occasion to extract the sting. You know the fate that awaits infuriated bees ; who, attacking man, and stinging them, lose their stings.

GEO. I suppose they become harmless—stingless.

HOR. Alas, they die !

The bee, disturb'd by man—from cause unknown—  
Quits the fair lily, or the rose full-blown,  
Where she was sucking honey for her cell.  
Round, round, she darts, humming her funeral knell !  
The swain, alas ! vainly essays to drive  
This hapless little bee back to her hive.  
The more he strives—less reasonable she :  
Ah, hope forlorn ! The silly frenzied bee  
Makes a bold dash, and on transparent wing  
She triumphs—but in stabbing, lost her sting !

GEO. You are quite poetical on the subject. I have no objection to preserve my sting, and become your queen bee, provided my uncle has no objections.

HOR. If he has any I will remove them one by one. In the mean time we will call on the Grimshaws—you know they expect us.

GEO. With all my heart.

*Exeunt arm in arm, c.*

*Enter BIBB and MRS. CHURCHILL, from R.*

BIBB. Nonsense, my dear Cornelia. Why put off the day which is to make Archer Bibb the happiest of mortals?

MRS. C. It is a very serious matter—more serious than you contemplate.

BIBB. Was that the reply you made to your first husband?

MRS. C. Alas! no!

BIBB. Then why, dearest Cornelia, make such a one to me?

MRS. C. The fact is, I am much to blame.

BIBB. To blame?

MRS. C. Yes. For listening to my brother. Why have I abandoned the seclusion I vowed to keep for ever? Why have I cast off my weeds, why have I donned these flounced dresses, puffed out with crinoline, when I ought to wear sack-cloth and ashes. Why have I mingled once more with the world?

BIBB. On my soul, I do not know.

MRS. C. To please a phantasy of my brother. And what is the result?

BIBB. The result is that you have captivated the heart of a lone widower, who also vowed to live, for ever and ever, sequestered in Bibbersvale.

MRS. C. But I have taken a solemn vow never to marry.

BIBB. So did I.

MRS. C. I know I shall never meet with such a husband as I have lost.

BIBB. I thought so too, when I lost Angelina.

MRS. C. I am astonished to find myself at Brighton.

BIBB. So am I.

MRS. C. My conscience reproaches me.

BIBB. Mine did, but now it don't.

MRS. C. Alas, I sigh.

BIBB. So do I.

MRS. C. I sigh for my dear departed husband. (*sighs*)

BIBB. And I sigh for thee, my dearest Cornelia! (*sighs*)

*Enter MARY from C.*

MARY. Please, ma'am, you are wanted directly.

BIBB. By whom?

MARY. By the doctor, who has something important to communicate. A tel-her-gram, he calls it, just come by the wires from London.

MRS. C. Tell my brother I shall be with him directly. (*Exit MARY, C.*)  
A telegraphic dispatch! Something of importance.—Will you excuse me?

BIBB. By all means; only do not stop too long. I am miserable without you.

MRS. C. I will return as speedily as I can. (*curtsies Exit R.*)

*Enter MRS. BEERS from L., who stands listening unperceived.*

BIBB. She seems deuced fond of that first husband of hers. How singular it is people are always fond of that which they have lost. If parents lose a child, that brat is invariably the flower of the flock; the handsomest, the most amiable, the cleverest of the lot. I thought there was no woman like Angelina. Its' all a mistake, there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it. So it is with women. I am determined to remove her scruples; and, I bet my existence, when Mrs. Churchill becomes Mrs. Bibb, I shall hear no more about defunct Churchill than that ex-husband hears about his relict. I wish I could meet with Mrs. Beers, she would advise me how to act.

MRS. BEERS. (*advancing*) What! Mr. Bibb! all alone in your glory.

BIBB. Glory, did you say, my dear Mrs. Beers? That, I hope, is to come. I am overjoyed to see you. You have come in the nick of time; you—my consoler, my comforter, my adviser. Do you know, if you had not thrown cold water upon my advances, in lieu of courting the widow Churchill, who cannot make up her mind to change her name, you might, ere this, have changed yours.

MRS. BEERS. I feel flattered, indeed I do. What progress are you making?

BIBB. Rather slowish.

MRS. BEERS. Slow, but sure.

BIBB. I have gone as far as propriety will permit. I have kissed hands—kissed her rosy cheeks.

MRS. BEERS. Indeed! As far as that?

BIBB. Oh, but I have gone further than that.

MRS. BEERS. What have you done?

BIBB. Proposed.

MRS. BEERS. Proposed!

BIBB. Yes, and await my doom. I am on thorns.

MRS. BEERS. I fear you have been too hasty. You know I recommended caution.

BIBB. Remember, she is a widow, and—

MRS. BEERS. A widow! so am I. What dif—

BIBB. I beg your pardon, my dear madam; but you know, at least I presume, that widows do not like long courtship. What may suit a girl of eighteen, will not suit a widow.

MRS. BEERS. Then I presume widows are to be taken by storm.

BIBB. Precisely.

MRS. BEERS. Then, permit me to tell you, it is quite a mistake. When a widow has had a good husband, and Heaven knows both Mrs. Churchill and I had good husbands, we look before we leap.

BIBB. Pray oblige me, Mrs. Beers. Don't begin about your husband. I am sick of hearing about dead husbands. One would think such men as Messrs. Churchill and Beers were the rarest ducks in the world; that their like is not to be found. How would you like if I were to marry you?

MRS. BEERS. Me!

BIBB. Yes, you! How would you like me to be eternally bringing Angelina's name on the *tapis*? How would you like me to say, "Rosa,

dear, what a night-cap! Had you seen those Angelina wore. Rosa, dear, what custards! You will never make the custards Angelina made. No, Rosa, you have not half the taste dear Angelina had. Ah! if you had Angelina's angelical temper. The fact is you would wish me and Angelina at the devil.

MRS. BEERS. La! Mr. Bibb.

BIBB. La! Mrs. Beers, you know it is so. However, I thank you most sincerely for the interest you have taken in this matter.

MRS. BEERS. There is no occasion for that, I assure you. We should help one another in this world. I have already advised you not to be in too great a hurry; perhaps you will permit me, for the last time, to proffer one more word of advice.

BIBB. By all means. You are so kind.

MRS. BEERS. (*pointedly*) Be sure there is no deception practised upon you.

BIBB. Deception?

MRS. BEERS. I mean deception. Some people are so deceitful.

BIBB. Impossible!

MRS. BEERS. Do not make too sure of that.

BIBB. You yourself told me Mrs. Churchill was all that can be desired in woman. Is she not handsome, amiable, wealthy——?

MRS. BEERS. Decidedly.

BIBB. Her brother is a highly respectable man, and stands high in the profession.

MRS. BEERS. There is no denying that.

BIBB. Mr. Churchill seems open-hearted, frank, the very personification of candour.

MRS. BEERS. Do you think so?

BIBB. Do you doubt it?

MRS. BEERS. Without naming any person in particular, I say, mind there is no deception.

BIBB. You surely do not mean that the widow is making a fool of me.

MRS. BEERS. You will be the best judge of that when the proper time arrives. For anything I know to the contrary, she may be dying of love for you. However, as I said before, should you fancy that any deception has been practised upon you, come to me! At any rate, you may count upon me.

BIBB. A thousand thanks, dear Mrs. Beers. How shall I prove my gratitude?

MRS. BEERS. I shall certainly expect to be rewarded for all the trouble I have taken in this matter. If you will leave the award to be settled by me, when the proper time comes, you will have no occasion to regret Mrs. Beers as an arbitrator. Excuse me now—besides you must not forget your appointment with Mrs. Churchill. Go, or she will become jealous of the widow Beers.

BIBB. (*taking her hand and raising it to his lips*) You are a kind, considerate, charming creature. You know I fancied you before I saw you. Ah! Mrs. Beers! if you had not shuffled out of it, you might ere this have been Mrs. Bibb. Farewell for the present. (*aside*) A devilish woman!

*Exit BIBB, C.*

*Enter DR. CHURCHILL from R., looking very pensive.*

MRS. BEERS. Well, doctor, you seem in a brown study. Have you hit upon a new remedy to cure jealousy?

DR. C. I was thinking what a precious ass I am making of myself. It is all your fault Mrs. Beers, and I much regret I allowed my wife to lend herself to the gross deception that is being practised on poor Bibb. It will end very seriously. He may call me out, and I might shoot him, which would be very unpleasant; or else he might shoot me, which would be worse.

MRS. BEERS. Ah! but you forget, if such were the case, Cornelia would in reality be a widow.

DR. C. Have compassion on my feelings. When he discovers that you are at the bottom of all this, he will cut you to a dead certainty.

MRS. BEERS. I will take the risk on myself. I am enjoying the joke amazingly.

DR. C. Indeed! Don't you see Mr. Bibb is mad in love with my wife. I really cannot stand these assignations any longer; and what with *bouquets*, presents, kisses, declarations, and popping of questions, I shall go raving mad!

MRS. BEERS. Surely, you are not jealous?

DR. C. Jealous!

MRS. BEERS. You place every confidence in Cornelia?

DR. C. Unquestionably! Why not?

MRS. BEERS. She is acting her part to perfection.

DR. C. (*excited*) So it seems. But all this, as I have said before, may end tragically. I am a violent man, Mrs. Beers. A desperate man. If I catch Bibb once more on his knees before my wife, I'll strangle—I'll be the death of him, I know I shall—It will be murder—foul, rank murder—they will hang me—I know they will.

MRS. BEERS. Calm yourself.

DR. C. Calm myself, indeed! I can't be calm—I shan't be calm!—I won't calm myself, so that I may be in the fit state of mind to wreak my vengeance upon Bibb. If anything occurs, the blame will be laid to your door. Remember *that* Mrs. Beers—and—if, perchance—you should stumble over the body of Bibb, recollect that you, and you only, are the cause.

*Exit DR. C., highly excited, R.*

MRS. BEERS. (*laughs*) Ha! ha! ha! Glorious! Capital! Why he is more jealous than Othello. Poor doctor, his occupation is gone. He thinks more of poor dear good natured Bibb than his prescriptions. What silly weak-minded creatures men are, and they call us the weaker sex—There never was a greater mistake. Why we can twist them round our thimbles, the simpletons. So far so good. I must now seek Mrs. Churchill, and concoct, unknown to the jealous doctor, a meeting between her, Mr. Bibb, and myself, in order to have an explanation, for it is quite clear, if the doctor catches Bibb making any more declarations to his wife, the consequences *may* be very serious. He has, it is true, put up with this joke for the last three weeks, and the patience of man has a limit. One thing is certain, Mr. Bibb still nourishes a hankering after me, and the reward he has promised me will be this hand.



He is not the man I take him to be if he does not forgive the joke. It will be a miracle if Mr. Bibb don't lead me to the hymeneal altar.

*Exit L*

*Enter ROBERT, from C.*

BOB. By jingo, master is getting worse and worser! I don't desactly know who is the worserer of the two, the sham brother or my poor master. What a fool they are making on im. It's that hartful widder Beers' fault. I'm sartin she has sot her cap at him. 'Ave him she will. Two guineas a day is no bad earnings for a holding of one's tongue. Gemini! I could hold it for never at that ere rate. If this would only last, Bob would soon be able to go into the public line. I have sot my eyes on the tap called the "RISING SUN." Mary would superwise the pumping department; I would look arter the kistomers and the spirits—keep a shay too, to give Mary a hairing on Sundays. She is a down-right and upright good girl anyhow, and I knows missus will do what's right.

*Enter MARY, from C.*

MARY. Well, Robert, the crisis is coming.

BOB. What? The end of the world!

MARY. I hope not, for you and I would have no occasion to take the lease of the "RISING SUN." I mean, things are coming to a head.

BOB. I don't comprehend. Who's coming to a head.

MARY. You are stupid to-day. I mean things can't last much longer, as they be at present. The doctor is aside himself. Your master is quite crazy smitten. My missis is perplexed. It seems to me that the only folks who be in their senses is Master Horatio and Miss Georgiana, and Mister Robert Groom and Mary Stubbs, who have settled their little matters like sensible people, as they be.

BOB. And we shall walk quietly into the "RISING SUN," and sell—

MARY. Unadulterated beer and spirits. Do you know, Bob, what Mrs. Beers has promised me.

BOB. How should I? I know I gets forty bob odd, every night.

MARY. She has promised me £250, if all goes right.

BOB. Oh! my sniggins! You don't say so?

MARY. But missis does. She will keep her word, I know it. Won't we be happy, Bob?

BOB. Sha'nt we be 'appy, Mary. I fancies I sees you behind the bar a pumpin and drawin single X., double X., and triple X., and fourpenny hale and brandy, looking so smart and pretty; and I, seated in a harm chair, smoking a pipe with the kistomers—You know we must look arter the kistomers.

MARY. Of course—but you must attend to the business. I can't do all—

BOB. Certainly not! (*aside*) I'll hedulterate the liquors, I will! (*voices heard*) By jingo, my master! Where shall we hide. O lor! O lor!

MARY. Quick, behind these curtains. *They hide behind curtain, L.*

*Enter DR. CHURCHILL, MRS. BEERS, HORATIO, and GEORGIANA.*

MRS. BEERS. (*to DR. C.*) Do, my dear sir, do calm yourself. They have only gone for a walk round the Steen. They will soon be here. If you will leave the explanations to me, I will spare you a vast deal of trouble, and the flirtations with Mrs. Churchill shall cease forthwith.

DR. C. Flirtations do you call them?

HOR. That's all, uncle—only harmless flirtations.

DR. C. Hold your tongue, sir. What do you know about it?

GEO. I beg your pardon, doctor; Horatio seems to know a vast deal more than you imagine.

DR. C. About flirtations!

GEO. And the like. He has proposed.

DR. C. To whom?

GEO. Why, to whom else but to me.

DR. C. What? without consulting his uncle.

GEO. If you sanctioned his aunt, Mrs. Churchill, to be kissed and courted by *my* uncle Mr. BIBB, I see no reason why Horatio should not have *carte blanche* to do likewise. Besides, it is so very natural.

DR. C. Oh! very! (*to HOR.*) So you have popped the question, sir?

HOR. Most respected uncle, I confess I have.

DR. C. And you expect my, and—

HOR. The widow Churchill's consent.

DR. C. Respect my feelings, sir. Listen to me, Horatio. (*aside to HOR.*) I will consent to your marriage with Miss Bibb on one condition.

HOR. And that condition? (MRS. BEERS *listens*)

DR. C. That you induce Mrs. Beers, at once, to put a stop to this dry joke of hers.

MRS. BEERS. I consent, on one condition also, namely, that you permit the farce to be continued for fifteen minutes more, after which you shall be put out of your misery. (*knocking heard*) There they are. Make haste, doctor, get behind the curtains (*pushes him, R.*) there, (*closes curtains*) that will do. I will leave my bedroom door ajar, so as to pop out in the nick of time. You, Horatio, and Georgy., go behind these curtains (*they go to curtains, L., MRS. B. closes them*) Good, that will do. None of you are to move without a signal from me. When Mr. Bibb falls on his knees, which he is sure to do, we will all rush from our hiding-places, laugh at him, and then explain everything.

DR. C. Be it so; only don't keep me on tenter hooks too long.

*Exit MRS. BEERS, L.*

*Enter BIBB and MRS. CHURCHILL, from C.*

BIBB. I am delighted you like the brooch. I am certain your brother will admire it.

MRS. C. You are really too kind.

BIBB. Kind! Is it not my duty to be kind? Ought I not to think of you day or night? Sleeping or dreaming, I think love of thee! Why do you look so sad, Cornelia?

MRS. C. Because you remind me of a dream I had last night. It keeps haunting me.

BIBB. Who cares for dreams? I don't! Believe me it is all bosh.

MRS. C. Ah! my dream was a sad one. I feel faint when I think of it.

BIBB. (*brings a chair*) Pray be seated. (*sits down*) What can I give you?

MRS. C. Nothing thank you. I dreamed I was seated in this very room—that you were telling me all the pretty things you tell so well.

BIBB. (*aside*) The dear creature. (*moves to R., so as to have his back to Dr. C.*)

MRS. C. Suddenly you fell on your knees——

BIBB. Delightful! Like this? (*falls on one knee*)

MRS. C. Just so. And you were kissing my hand. Oh! so fervently.

BIBB. (*kisses her hand*) Like this, dear Cornelia?

MRS. C. Just so. And you pressed me——

BIBB. To my bosom? (*Dr. C. opens the curtains and peeps*)

MRS. C. No—to name the day.

BIBB. Name, O name it! Say this day week.

MRS. C. Just so.

BIBB. Be it so then, this day week. (*Dr. C. advances on tiptoe.*)

MRS. C. And then you rose to throw your arms round my neck.

BIBB. Did I?

MRS. C. Why don't you rise? It occurred in my dream.

BIBB. (*rises*) I am ready, but you must rise also.

MRS. C. (*rising*) I am prepared.

BIBB. This act confirms the dream. (*BIBB opens his arms, is about to obey, when Dr. C. seizes him by the collar, and pulls him back*)

Dr. C. Villain! How dare you kiss my wife? (*shaking him*)

*Enter Mrs. BEERS.*

BIBB. Murder! Was that—in—the dream?

MRS. C. Yes. My husband arose from the dead. Behold! he stands beside thee.

BIBB. Have mercy! Call your brother——Doctor——Mrs. Beers——Help!

*HORATIO and GEORGIANA advance. Dr. C. relinquishes his hold.*

HOR. What's the row?

BIBB. (*turns round and perceives the doctor*) My brother-in-law! Doctor, are you mad? What means this conduct? I thought——

*BOB and MARY advance.*

Dr. C. Mr. Bibb, that lady is my wife.

BIBB. Poh! Nonsense! No more your wife than mine. Sir, I demand satisfaction for this insult. Choose your weapons——

Dr. C. (*to Mrs. BEERS*) I told you so.

BIBB. Pistols, swords, revolvers, foils, six pounders—anything you like.

Dr. C. Its all the same to me, foils if you like. (*aside*) I'll foil him

BIBB. I'll have blood, sir—do you hear?—blood! One of us must die!



DR. C.	MRS. C.	BIBB.	MRS. BEERS.	HOR.	GEO.	BOB.	MARY.
	R.		C.			L.	

BIBB. Hold your tongue (to MRS. BEERS) Pardon me, madam, will you proceed?

MRS. BEERS. With pleasure. When I was made acquainted with the object of your visit—of course I felt highly flattered (*curtsies to BIBB, who bows*)—I was wicked enough to call a council of war, composed of Doctor and Mrs. Churchill, and Mr. Horatio. I induced them, not without some difficulty, to join in the conspiracy. Mrs. Churchill consequently kindly consented to act the part of a widow.

BIBB. Kindly!

MRS. C. It was taking a very onerous post Do forgive me Mr. Bibb. I'll never do so again.

MRS. BEERS. It was only a dry joke.

BIBB. Ah! very dry.

DR. C. (*to BIBB, aside*) You had better take Beers at once. See, how she sparkles!

BIBB. Is that your advice?

DR. C. Decidedly. She only wanted to see what stuff you were made of before committing herself.

MRS. BEERS. I hope Mr. Bibb you will forgive us?

MRS. C. Pray do, Mr. Bibb.

DR. C. Come, Bibb, give us your hand and let us be friends, (*they shake hands*) and having sworn friendship, perhaps you will permit me, as a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, to prescribe for each of you individually and collectively.

BIBB. With all my heart.

DR. C. I shall commence with myself. *Imprimis*—I prescribe that I resume my matrimonial position, and that Mrs. Churchill drop the assumed cognomen of the widow Churchill; such substantive, indicative of a lady who has been deprived of her husband, only to be assumed after the death of her present lord and master. Do you agree Mrs. Churchill?

MRS. C. I do.

DR. C. I now prescribe that Archer Bibb, Esq., of Bibbersvale, County of Sussex, widower, who, being afflicted with a thirst that has become chronic, take the only remedy pointed out in the British and Foreign Pharmacopœia for such maladies, namely, and this is the RECIPE:—To take unto himself Rosa Beers, a widow, who must, however, not be well shaken before being taken, for reasons best known to Mr. Bibb, and bibbers in general.

BIBB. (*to MRS. BEERS*) What say you Mrs. Beers. Will the Recipe suit you?

MRS. BEERS. As the doctor has ordained it, I suppose I must abide by the medical prescription—Mr. Bibb, here is my hand.

BIBB. (*taking it*) And here is mine. Do you really give me your heart?

MRS. BEERS. I do.

DR. C. One moment, I have not finished. There are two more prescriptions to be made, namely, that Horatio Churchill, my nephew, espouse Miss Bibb; and that Robert Grooms, to whom I shall present £50, be united to Mary Stubbs, to whom I also give £50, in order to encourage them in the art of keeping a secret.

BOB. }

MARY. } O! thank you sir—thank you, sir. How kind!

BIBB. I consent, as far as Georgiana is concerned. As for you, Bob, you rascal, how could you allow your master to be made such a fool of?

BOB. If you please, sir, I was told it would be all for your and my good in the long run—Was'nt I, Mary?

MARY. Yes, dear. Is'nt our "SUN" rising now?

BOB. Wait a bit, there'll be daughters a-rising too—never fear!

MRS. BEERS. (*advancing*)

When Bibb or bibbers get uncommon dry,  
For beer or spirits all these tipplers cry.  
This Mr. Bibb, whom by my side you see,  
Had heard of beers, concen—trated in me.  
No half and half—(though worser halves oft vex  
Their better halves, when drunk with double X.)—  
Will Archer Bibb find in the widow B.,  
Who, scorning Beers, will still a bibber be.

BIBB. (*to audience*)

And be ye bibbers too—ne'er mind taxations,  
None can your spirit tax, save dire vexations;  
To banish these, come see "HOTEL FLIRTATIONS."

BOB.	MARY.	DR. C.	MRS. C.	BIBB.	MRS. BEERS.	HOR.	GEO.
R.				C.		L.	

**Curtain.**



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